

The Despair of Unbelief

REV. A. POWER, S.J.

*Sermon delivered in the Melbourne Cathedral and reprinted
from the "Tribune"*

"HOPE springs eternal in the human breast." Hope is the fire that keeps the current of man's life ever flowing in healthy vigor; if that fire dies down, man sinks into apathy and despair. If a man cannot look forward with confidence to securing the possession of some good thing on which he has set his heart, his nature shrivels up, his life is blighted.

Knowledge (or truth) alone will not suffice; our nature craves also the satisfaction of loving and seeking to possess what is good. As the mind needs truth, so the heart needs love; and the one is just as essential to happiness as the other.

If a man is finally balked of all power of loving and of striving to possess that which he loves, then he is in Hell.

Man lives in the future. Hope is the mainspring of all human activity. A prize of some kind which man sets his heart upon and strives to secure for himself with toil and effort—that is the essential condition of all effective work.

The prize may be material outward possessions, such as gold; a man wants to be a millionaire, to become a king of commerce, to control a great industry, to be like Henry Ford or Carnegie or Rockefeller.

Or the prize may be simply a position of power amongst his fellows. The story is told of Lord Roseberry that when a boy he made up his mind to become either Archbishop of Canterbury or Prime Minister of England. Other men are attracted by the glamor of literary fame—to achieve success as poet or artist. So

John Milton spent his life filled with a great ambition to produce a poem which Englishmen would not willingly let die. And he actually secured this prize after a life of toil by writing "Paradise Lost."

To other men the prize of existence lies in success as explorers, penetrating into unknown regions and widening the boundaries of human knowledge. For twenty years Christopher Columbus nursed in his heart the great ambition of crossing the Atlantic Ocean and finding out what lay beyond; and that hope of his led to the discovery of America.

For others, military glory, "seeking the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth," has an irresistible charm; whilst to the Saints the prize of holiness is the talisman that nerves them to lead lives of penance or face the martyr's death of anguish with cheerful and undaunted courage. . . .

Always where great achievement is found it is the result of the fire of hope blazing strongly in man's soul. On the other hand, despair paralyzes all man's energies, freezes the genial currents of the soul, and makes heroic effort, or any kind of effort, an impossibility, and finally leads to ruin of body and soul.

Now, the thought I would put before you is this. Jesus Christ has inspired mankind with hope, as no other leader or teacher or conqueror has ever done. He has lit up the lives of thousands of millions of the human race with the fire of hope, and thus has lifted up for mankind the burden of despair which, as the result of irreligion and unbelief, was pressing heavily upon it and plunging men ever deeper into the horrors of idolatry and immoral living. This fact, that the religion of Jesus is the religion of hope, which appeals irresistibly (when it is allowed to exert its due influence) to the inexhaustible fount of hope which is deep down in every human heart, is a strong proof that Christ's religion is the religion of truth, the religion that satisfies the wants and cravings of our nature.

Now, that unbelief, denial of God, the rejection of religion, leads logically and inevitably to pessimism and despair, and so tends to undermine civilization and destroy the whole social fabric, needs no long demonstration.

In speaking on this subject, and in using the title "The Despair of Unbelief," we do not mean to imply that infidels, men who reject religion, are necessarily living in a state of despair, or that they have no peace or happiness in life. On the contrary, many of them may taste of the pleasures of life and enjoy its good things far more deeply than those who believe in and try to serve God. But, just as a man who is living beyond his income and is heading straight for the Bankruptcy Court may be taking life very easily, and be quite unconscious or quite heedless of the real state of affairs and of the crash that is sure to come, or just as the occupant of a boat on the St. Lawrence River in Canada may be oblivious of the fact that the current on which he floats is running strongly towards the Falls of Niagara, and that he is being swept along to destruction, so it is with the infidel. He, too, is living on a system which is simply a bankrupt system, which can only lead to disaster; he is floating on a current which is heading for a cataract, and yet he may be, whether wilfully or unconsciously, quite blind to the true state of affairs. It is not the men we are attacking, they must be judged by their own conscience and the light they have received. We are simply denouncing the system, whether it is called Rationalism, Agnosticism, Unbelief, or whatever name you like to give it, as a bad and dangerous system, as a system calculated to do infinite harm to mankind, subversive of all morality, and a menace to civil society. And we say that, whether those who profess atheism recognize the fact or not, the system leads logically to despair.

Look round the world today outside of the Christian Church; contemplate that part of mankind that refuses to profit by the teaching of Christ and share the hope inspired by Him, and what do we find. Moral decay, ever-increasing licentiousness of conduct, the habitual misuse of marriage, divorce a matter of daily occurrence, family life gradually disappearing, terrible suicide statistics, capitalism domineering over the laboring classes, widespread unemployment, millions of men and women either starving or dependent upon public charity for support, the cities of the Old World centers of moral corruption, honeycombed with hideous slums whose physical and moral misery baffle all description.

You need not remind me that there has been marvellous material progress; that science can boast of triumphs and achievements such as the world had never seen or even dreamt of hitherto; that ever-new devices are being made available to add to the comfort and pleasure of mankind. All that I know.

But I know, too, that a similar story of splendid outward development was told of the great Roman civilization into which Christ was born, of that world-wide empire over which Augustus ruled. Yet we know that the heart of that civilization was rotten, and this inward rottenness led to its downfall. It was undermined by the moral foulness of idolatry and creature worship; by gross sensuality and cruelty; and all the hideous vices of slavery; by the degrading amusement of the gladiatorial shows—those terrible displays where men butchered each other the livelong summer's day to satisfy the corrupt and depraved taste that found its satisfaction in gloating over murder and the shedding of human blood.

Now, I do not mean to say that the modern world, even the modern pagan world, is as bad as that; but if the modern world is better, it owes its improvement to the Christian religion, and in a twofold way. First, it has the advantage of being based on Christian principles of decency and morality. The noble ideas and sentiments that actuate men, even men who profess to be atheists, are really derived from Christianity; almost unconsciously such men are making use of and living according to a code of conduct and morality derived from the religion which they spend their time in attacking and vilifying. In the second place, the modern pagan world, though so corrupt, is leavened by the large body of Christian believers who live in its midst and take part in its social, commercial and political life. The faith and charity and purity of Christianity are constantly exercising their influence for good on the unbelievers with whom Christians come in contact.

We are, therefore, very far from asserting that the world is as bad now as when Christ came. But what we do say is this: that if the modern world can look with hope to the future, if there is a certain respectable standard of decency and morality kept before the public, if the shameless vices and enormities of the pagan world are not

flaunted before our eyes, that is due entirely to the fact that Christianity is in the world, that Jesus of Nazareth is still exercising His influence for good, that His precepts and His principles are still ringing in men's hearts, and keeping in check those evil impulses which would, if unchecked, seize all mankind and make it their prey.

Of itself, and left to itself, unbelief tends to nothing but despair. Atheism is like poison in the blood. Sometimes a man who gets an infection is strong enough and healthy enough to withstand the evil influence of the germ. He may grow languid and sickly, but he does not die, because his reserve of strength enables him to fight the intruder. So it is with modern society. It has been infected with the poisonous germs of atheism, but religion, which still flourishes in the world, prevents the natural results from following. Society is morally decrepit and feeble, but still keeps its course, because religion still nourishes it. In other words, the truth about God is still battling for recognition; the seed sown by Jesus of Nazareth is still germinating and producing fruit, in spite of the unfavorable nature of the soil and the hostility of paganism to its growth.

I say that, of itself, unbelief tends to pessimism and despair. How could it be otherwise? If it be true that death is the end of everything, if there is no soul and no immortality, and if this short and fleeting life is all we have to enjoy, then surely the only thing to do is to enjoy this life to the full, and to get all we can out of it, without any regard to morality or virtue. For if there is no God and no hereafter, and no soul, then morality and virtue are empty words. Why bother about them? "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," should be our motto. But that is surely the language of despair. If that principle be universally adopted, the end of all reasonable society has come.

But now let us ask how has Jesus kindled the fire of hope in men's hearts? What is the appeal He has made that has so revolutionized the world? What is the strong antidote He has administered to counteract the numbing poison of infidelity and atheism? It is this: Jesus has taught the world that there is something that makes life worth living—a prize which every child of Adam can set his heart upon and labor to secure, a pur-

pose on which it is worth while spending all the energies of his nature, the attaining of which will satisfy every noble longing and ambition of his restless heart.

History and experience prove that one of the influences which have been most successful in kindling the fire of hope and enthusiasm in men's hearts and drawing out of men the very best that is in them is the appeal of some great cause which wakes them up to new energy, because it seems to be a cause worth working for, worth living for, worth fighting for, and perhaps worth dying for. A great hope, a great love, a great devotion, a great passion of enthusiasm sweeps into their life, seizes on them and transforms them from ordinary selfish mortals into heroes ready to do and dare all for the achievement of a great purpose.

It may be a love of country or love of liberty, it may be love of wife and family, or perhaps love of honor, love of adventure, love of a great leader, or perhaps love of God; but whatever it is, once this blazing fire of enthusiasm for a great cause takes possession of the heart, then great things will be done. History affords innumerable examples of this. . . .

Now, Jesus of Nazareth knew this. He knew the human heart better than any man that ever lived. He knew that down deep in the soul of every man and woman this instinct of devotion lies latent, waiting for the occasion to call it forth, and He came to appeal to that instinct.

As a matter of historical fact, which all admit, both friends and foes alike, Jesus of Nazareth has roused the world as no man ever has roused it. He has been a leader such as the world has never known before or since; this man of boundless enthusiasm, of limitless ambition with a fire of love blazing in His soul which overleaped all obstacles and brought the world to His feet.

Now, what was the prize Jesus held out to kindle our hope? It is the prize of eternal life—nothing less than the possession of God Himself.

Jesus came to say to each one of us: "God wants you for Himself. God is inviting you to sit at His banquet and partake of His bounty. And not only does He wish you to belong to Him, but He wants you to labor to bring other souls also to know and to love Him—He wants you to be His apostle."

And the soul that hears this Divine message will, perhaps, cry out in astonishment, "Can God want me? Can my soul be of use or of value to Him?"

Yes, God wants you, you personally and individually, you in spite of your weakness and misery and sinfulness; the infinite God wants you for Himself.

That is, after all, the summing up of Christ's message to the world. He came to tell us that. And God's desire to have you is so intense that in order to remove the obstacles that hindered your coming to Him, He became Man and died on the Cross. "For God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."

Now, if we once realize this; if this truth become a reality to us, a living, palpitating fact, then life puts on a new meaning; we begin to feel the fire of a new hope, the powerful stimulus of a new love.

See, for example, the revolution which the coming of Christ's message wrought in the soul of Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a Jew full of bitter hatred against Jesus of Nazareth and against the new doctrine that seemed to be undermining Saul's ancestral religion. Saul burned with eagerness to sweep away and utterly destroy the memory of Jesus of Nazareth and all His words. So he flung himself ardently into the business of persecuting the Christians—throwing them into prison and assisting when they were dragged to execution.

Then, one day, as he was journeying towards the great northern city of Damascus to carry out his persecuting program on a larger scale, Jesus stopped him on the road and asked him what he meant. Suddenly, as Saul rode along on the summer's day, a blaze of light dazzled him, he fell from his horse, and, lying on the road, he looked up at the radiant figure that stood over him, and from the lips of the heavenly visitor he heard this strange and piercing question: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And Saul, dazed and awestruck, asks, "Who art Thou, Lord?" and like a thunderbolt the answer came ringing back: "I am Jesus of Nazareth Whom you are persecuting."

Jesus of Nazareth! The Man whose name Saul had been trying to destroy off the face of the earth; the Man

whose disciples Saul had been throwing into jail and putting to death; this Man is revealed to him as a Divine Person asking him reproachfully, "Why are you persecuting Me?"

What was the effect of that one sentence from the lips of the great Leader? Well, that it kindled in the heart of Saul a fire of hope that consumed him for the rest of his life. For the thirty years that he lived after that vision of Jesus, Saul went about the Roman Empire telling men about Christ and His claims. Read his glorious epistles, and you will see how Jesus of Nazareth filled all the rest of his life and that he had but one ambition in life, to spend himself as the apostle of Christ in winning souls for Him.

The call of Christ, which rang so loud in the soul of St. Paul, is still ringing in the world, has come to each one of us if we could but listen to it. And this call is not merely a summons from the greatest Leader the world has ever known; it is not merely an appeal from a Man of more splendid intellect, of stronger will, of more loving heart than any other man. It is an appeal to you from the God that made you, the infinite God asking you to give Him your love and service, telling you He has work for you to do, and asking you to do that work for Him.

To some, that call will come more insistently as a summons to give up every other interest and occupation in order to devote themselves unreservedly to the business of spreading Christ's doctrine and saving souls for Him. That constitutes what Catholics call a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life. In answer to that call thousands of young people, young men and women in the flower of youth, are every year joining the ranks of the priesthood, or one or other of those great organizations of prayer and charity, the religious orders and congregations, which are the glory of the Catholic Church.

It was in response to this authoritative summons that the great Irish Mission to China sprang into existence a few years ago, and in such a short space of time has accomplished such wonders.

It was that same fire of hope which Patrick, the apostle of Ireland, kindled in the hearts of the Irish, when 400 years later he came to bring to the pagan people news

of the call of Christ. It was the same fire of hope which Augustine, the apostle, brought to Canterbury a century and a half later when he came to convert the Saxons. It was the same fire of hope which Boniface brought to the Germans, which a thousand Celtic missionaries spread all over the continent of Europe; which later Christian preachers carried across the Atlantic to the newly-discovered land of America.

And it was the same fire of hope which the earliest Catholic pioneers brought to this land of Australia a hundred years ago. This hope nerved and strengthened your Catholic forefathers in their long struggle to plant and nourish the Faith. And today, when we look round and see the Catholic Church so full of promise in this great land, we say to ourselves: all those splendid results; those innumerable churches, chapels, convents, schools, institutions of every kind built up by Catholic hands and with Catholic money—these and a thousand other signs, which tell of the generous, self-sacrificing spirit of Catholics who are true to their religion, are a mighty protest against the pessimism and the despair of unbelief; they are a glorious proof of the unshakable hope of immortality, the resolute purpose of securing the possession of God, which have resulted from the life-giving words of Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord and our God, to whom be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Modern Polytheism

TIMOTHY BROSNAHAN, S.J.

THAT we who breathe the air of Western civilization shall never again worship more than one God—if we continue to worship any—would seem to be a safe and a superfluous assertion. Polytheism is utterly alien to our speculative thought. No attribute of the Godhead apparently is more evident today than His unity. If there is a Supreme Being, the modern mind inexorably demands that there be but one. Difficulties may be raised regarding the infinity of God's wisdom, goodness, or justice; but no one would think of finding in the promptuary of

our philosophic or scientific speculations argument for a plurality of gods. That there is but one God may not perhaps be as easy to prove philosophically as that there is, for instance, an infinitely good God. Yet the bias of modern thought might permit the latter truth to be obscured by doubts, while it makes intellectual assent to the former not only reasonable, but imperative. If we should ever question our belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, it will not be on grounds tending to prove a multiplicity of ultimate causes. The tacit assumption that all manifestations of being and energy are to be harmonized and referred finally to a single principle is a paramount and regulative postulate of our philosophizing thought. A monistic explanation of the universe has always been to an extant, but today it is in an imperious manner, the goal of much of our philosophy and science. So insistent in fact is this modern prepossession that not only is a unitary origin of all things postulated, but in some circles philosophy is held to have failed in its purpose, unless it merges all fundamental distinctions and essential varieties of existence into a unitary nature. Even pantheism, therefore, which in its desire for unity denies the irremovable distinction between God and His world, between the infinite and the finite, between the necessary and contingent, would have a better chance of formal acceptance today than polytheism. How far the modern development of this mental craving for unity is the outcome of centuries of Christianity, which first offered a synthesis of mundane things, and of human history and destiny; how little it is due to intellectual progress and expansion of knowledge considered in themselves, I need not inquire. I am simply noting a fact, without stopping to investigate its causes; and the undeniable fact is, that the modern mind cannot think of God as being plural in nature.

Nothing, therefore, seems more unaccountable to us than the belief, almost universally prevalent before the coming of Christ among the wisest and the most civilized people of antiquity, that there were many beings possessing the attributes of divinity. The pagan mind accepted without demur, except in the case of a few of its greatest thinkers, the dogma that each separate people had its own separate and independent god, whose wisdom and providence were strictly national, who ruled, guided, and pro-

tected one people only, and to whom that people owed exclusive allegiance and adoration. Men learned, cultivated and refined, believed that there was a multitude of deities, each claiming the reverence and worship of its own selected portion of the human race. The persuasion was the warp of the intellectual and political life of paganism. Those who did not share it were looked upon as godless men. Socrates suffered death because he attempted to persuade the youth of Athens that the popular theogony was foolish. From the works of early ecclesiastical writers we learn that the first Christians were called atheists, because, although they professed a belief in one true God, they refused worship to the gods of Rome and denied their divine character. In those old pagan times a man was required under penalty of losing his life to be so broadminded, that he would concede what today we should regard as absurd. Those who maintained that they alone worshipped the only true God were deemed intolerant, and dangerous members of civil society. They might be, as St. Justin Martyr says they were, upright men, models of propriety, urbanity and loyalty in their domestic and social relations, scrupulously faithful in the observance of the laws, in paying their taxes, and in bearing their share of a citizen's burden; but unless they publicly admitted that each distinctive people had a right to its own god, and that these were entitled to divine worship they were branded disturbers of the public peace and enemies of the State. Now not only does this seem to us irrational, but the very mental habit of civilized paganism is incomprehensible to us. Our philosophic historians and historical critics offer various palliating explanations of this religious phenomenon. The pagan frame of mind regarding the diety is such a dishonorable reflection on human intelligence, which in our day is in rather good repute, that theories in extenuation of the blot on our common nature's escutcheon easily gain a hearing. These explanations inadequate though they be, are oftentimes received with approval and assent by thoughtful men who do not care to look the fact of polytheism in the face. The fact is, however, that to peoples who were our peers intellectually monotheism was neither a necessary nor a familiar concept.

To all appearances, therefore, there is an antipodean

contract between ancient and modern religious thought. Modern thought in dealing with the deity rejects polytheism, as utterly untenable. Ancient thought accepted it; and until the diffusive ideas presented by Christianity to the Gentiles began to work amongst them, monotheism was a doctrine foreign to their thinking, and out of harmony with the exigencies of their national life. But is the difference in fact as radical as it appears in thought? Is there no polytheistic strain in modern religious life? And, confining the question to that religion which in one shape or another is the distinctive religion of Western civilization, do we at least, who designate ourselves Christians, all worship the same God? Assuredly we should maintain that we do. We assure ourselves again and again of this in stereotyped phrases that have become the accredited expressions of our common convictions. Though we acknowledge that we differ in the form of our religion and in the doctrines which underlie those forms, these differences, we take for granted, do not dissociate us in the object of our adoration. St. Paul's canon: "One God, one faith, and one baptism," which declares unity of belief and sacramental rite to be a sequence in Christianity of unity in object of our worship, is not in the judgment of many practically necessary, even though it be ideally right. All men of various denominations, it is contended, worship the same God Whom Christ revealed to us.

Now the question is obvious: If our religions are many is our God one? Does not a multiplicity of religions, distinct in doctrine, logically entail a multiplicity of Gods? We have risen from out the tomb of paganism in so far as we are speculatively, and as individuals, monotheists. But have we as yet practically and collectively cast off the grave-clothes of polytheism?

It is conceivable, of course, that forms of religion—understanding by the phrase the ritual observances by which exterior worship is paid to God—may be many, while the God so worshipped is one. In the supposition that there had been no revealed religion, or that a revealed religion had not prescribed any particular form of exterior worship, each people would be at liberty to choose that which best symbolized the truths which they believed; and these rites, provided they did not by im-

plication or tendency distort or misrepresent the truths which they were intended to signify, would each be legitimate. One might be a manifestation of a more profoundly religious insight than another, of a clearer perception of the spiritual mystically typified in the material; but within their respective limitations each would truly, however imperfectly or perfectly, be in the visible order the analogous adumbration and the sign of what was rightly believed to be the reality in the invisible order. I do not say that these varieties of ceremonial observances would not finally lead to distinct beliefs, but only that in themselves they are compatible with unity of religion.

It is furthermore conceivable that the creeds themselves of those professing the same religion may differ, providing the differences are merely privative. By creed I understand a formal statement of doctrines explicitly believed. If, therefore, one Christian body did not directly nor inferentially deny certain doctrines which were enunciated in set terms by another, but simply did not expressly assert them, both might be said to profess the same religion. While the positive content of one creed may be identified with that of a more developed creed, this latter may assert dogmas which are neither denied nor assented to by those who profess the former. The full import of an idea is not usually apprehended by a people to whom it is at first presented, nor by different people with equal penetration. Many of its necessary implications are only known sometimes after the thought of generations has been employed in its analysis and interpretation. Full assent, however, to an idea carries implicit assent to all that is contained in the idea. To one whose assent is real this implicit assent becomes explicit as the idea is unfolded. This is merely asserting in other words the common teaching of theologians, that there is no growth in the content of Faith, while there is a growth in the Faithful's apprehension of it. This is true not only in the course of the Church's history, but also in the intellectual development of each individual believer. In fact, as every reflecting man can testify from mental experience, it is true not only of religious truths, but of all truths by which conduct of whatever kind is governed. Now it is conceivable—whether historically a fact or not, I am not considering—that what happened in the succes-

sion of time might from whatever causes have happened *contemporaneously*; that a Divine Revelation would be more deeply investigated and comprehended with more richness of detail by a people of one temperament and moral elevation, than by another of different temperament and less aptitude for religion, more explicitly by an emotional and spiritual race than by a stolid and utilitarian one. And in this case the God adored by both would be the same, although knowledge of Him differed.

Again two religious bodies may worship the same God, though one may know Him only through natural reason, or an inchoate Revelation, while the other possessing ampler and higher sources of information has supplemented the creed of the first by beliefs which human understanding would never have evolved from it. These additions objectively and to an omnisciently intuitive intelligence would not be distinct and independent truths at all, but only the original truth clearly and fully fathomed. Even for a finite intelligence in a higher state some of these truths would cease to be mysteries; as Dante says (*Paradiso*, II, 43):

There what we hold by faith shall be beheld,
Not demonstrated, but self-known
In fashion of the initial truth which man believeth.

There might also be additional truths disclosing the special providence of God freely interposed in human affairs for the accomplishment of a Divine purpose. These would be new not only for men to whom they were revealed, but also in themselves. Yet when revealed they would be recognizable as consistent and concordant with former truths known by other means, and, therefore, as not changing the object of adoration.

Lastly there may be positive differences in explicit belief compatible with unity in the concept of God. I do not say that these different beliefs would all be true or equally tenable; but that the errors of one or the other would not entail different concepts of the Godhead. To borrow the principle on which the distinction between theological and cardinal virtues is determined, we may distinguish between doctrines which regard God Himself and those which regard the instruments and agencies through which He is known, the practical manner of serv-

ing Him, and the means of attaining union with Him. Differences of belief may exist concerning these latter doctrines of such a character as to separate their respective adherents into distinct denominations, one of which might be the true religion and the others more or less corrupted forms of it. Nevertheless all could be said to worship the same Lord and Creator, to acknowledge the same supreme Legislator, and to love the same Almighty Father.

But conceding the possibility of these suppositions—with their actual realizations, I am not at present concerned—we have limited the extent to which differences of religion consistent with unity of belief in the Godhead may be carried. There is a sense, of course, in which all men, however different the actual objects of their adoration, may be said to worship God, the sense which St. Paul had in mind when saying to the Athenians: "What you worship without knowing it, that I preach to you." Just as there is a sense in which even those who do evil may be said to have sought good. Under every form of worship however false or idolatrous there is the natural appetency of the soul towards a being of supreme might and authority. But the actual object by the worship of which the soul seeks to satisfy this religious impulse may be as wide apart as the idol of a savage and the Being Who revealed Himself to Moses: "I am who am." Because the impulse is radically the same it would be as reasonable to hold that the object of it is the same as it would be to hold that virtue and vice are the same because to satisfy the same generic instinct one is sought by one man, one by another.

If two or more bodies of Christians differ not only in their mode of worship, and in their explicit and affirmative beliefs regarding the Deity, but also in each denying of Him what the others assert, it is not possible that they should worship the same God. Religion on its intellectual side is the expression of a people's idea of God, of His attributes, and of the essential and Divinely prescribed relations of His creatures to Him. It ought to be clear, therefore, that there can be only one true body of doctrine regarding the nature of God, as that there can be only one true God. If there is one God, He must be the same for all nations, peoples and races. He cannot like the

herdsman of Neptune take on different shapes, as Teuton, Saxon, Celt, Slav, or Latin attempts to grasp Him. The truth about Him must be one. We cannot think of the same infinite and immutable Being receiving predicates which at once affirm and deny the same attributes. Individually we may confess our inability, greater or less according to our powers of speculative thought, to show, at least negatively, that there is no opposition between attributes which natural reason tells us that one having the plentitude of being must possess, or which Revelation declares that He does possess. But this is a different thing from asserting one attribute to the exclusion of the other, or denying one in order that we may with more security and mental quietude assert the other. If then, different Christian denominations hold conflicting and incompatible doctrines regarding the nature, attributes and characteristics of God, it follows that each has a different concept of Him. But each worships God as he conceives Him. There must be therefore as many gods worshipped today by those bearing the name of Christian, as there are different creeds or private judgments defining a distinct object of adoration.

Now there can be no doubt that by those who claim the title of Christians there are many creeds professed, which define deities essentially distinct and in some respects discordant. Assuredly the Trinitarian and the Unitarian do not worship the same God. Both, it is true, believe that God is one in nature, and infinite in perfection; but they differ as to a prerogative of that nature. The Trinitarian, on the authority of Revelation as interpreted by historical Christianity, believes it to be an essential prerogative of the Divine infinitude that while one in substance it is threefold in personality: that in the Divine nature, because it is such, there are necessarily three hypostatic or subsistent relations really differing from one another, and really identical with the one indivisible Divine substance which is possessed by each of them equally without subordination or succession. All this the Unitarian rejects, holding that there can be but one person in God, and denying that through the teaching of Christ any glimpse into the inner life of God has been conceded to us, which was not open to natural reason. Even granting that this divergence of beliefs arises in

part from the false or confused views on personality that have become prevalent since the time of Locke, or from a certain inaptitude to modify human ideas analogically when applying them to the Deity, there yet remains a difference affecting the very concept of that Supreme Being who is to be adored in spirit and truth. In fact the God worshipped by the Unitarian is in essence more akin to the God of Mahomet than to the God of historical Christianity. Again, he who denies the Divinity of Christ, or concedes it in some vague and indefinite Arian or Socinian sense, cannot worship the same God as he to whom belief in the Godhead of Christ is one of the dearest and most profound convictions of life. The God of Calvinism, whether it be the God of Beza foreordaining to eternal ruin antecedently and independently of the primeval sin some of these creatures that He has made to His image and likeness, or the God of the synod of Dort, who sent His son to die and offer salvation not to all men but to a selected portion of mankind, cannot be an object of adoration to the Universalist who, fixing his eyes exclusively on God's goodness and mercy, ignores His justice, and grants to the rebellious and finally unrepentant sinner as well as to the most heroic saint final union with their Creator and Saviour in beatitude. Could the God of the Universalist exist in the same universe with the God of Calvinism? And would the God of Calvinism tolerate Him? If, moreover, we reflect that even among those nominally belonging to one or other of the many Evangelical Churches there are many, who exercising their right of private judgment have mentally fashioned for themselves ideas of God in accord with their finite notions of what the supreme, infinite and ineffable Being should be, we can easily realize the multitude of Gods that are worshipped today by those who call themselves Christians. Each is worshipping the workmanship of his private judgment as truly as the pagan worshipped the workmanship of his hands. The idolatry is only more refined. Then too, is the God Who requires us to believe that He incarnate, is really, truly and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine on the altars of Catholics the same God as He whom we may worship only on condition of believing that the Catholic belief is idolatrous?

Lastly, we have the Christian who maintains that one religion is as good as another. If his creed is not a plea to let all religion alone, or a confession that religion has no intellectual basis, or an open avowal that he has no definite ideas behind his words, he necessarily worships a God who is indifferent about truth. If it does not matter what one believes, then service and submission of the mind are not called for by religion. Is such a God to whom intellectual rectitude is of no importance the same as the God who asks for the whole service of man, not only the devotion of his heart, but the whole allegiance of his intellect, whose first and greatest commandment is: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and *with all thy mind*?" If there is a God, He is a God of infinite truth, and the true and false cannot appeal to Him for equal approbation. He cannot look with the same eyes of complaisance on systems mutually asserting and denying certain of His attributes, or special workings of His providence. He may condone the errors of the ignorant who in the sincerity of their hearts offer Him false intellectual service. He may be merciful to those who are inculpably groping through the doctrines of false beliefs and humbly trying to find Him. He may bestow His favors on those who keep His commandments as far as they know them. He may bring to the haven of eternal safety at last those who have never sinned against the light. But He does not regard truth regarding Himself as of no importance, and error as equally good, nor approve the intellectual mistakes of His creatures regarding Him.

He has given man an intellect in order that he might know truth. He cannot wish that man should abuse this faculty, when the essential wisdom of life is concerned. The love of a lie, adherence to it, or lazy acquiescence in it, is held to be a dishonor to a man's rational nature, when a temporal matter of some moment is in question. The same intellectual mood cannot be commendable, when the highest function of his life is at issue. One religion can be as good as another only when one is as true as another. If one is as true as another, if a Socinian, a Calvinist, a Lutheran, a Catholic or other religion are all equally true, their respective deities are all equally ador-

able. Admit this, and we shall have an elective system of polytheism, differing from the polytheism of pre-Christian people in this, that our God is not prescribed for us by the law of the land, whereas the pagan's was. Each of us may fashion for himself a god, not out of stone or metal as the gross pagan did, but out of the more subtle material of imagination and desire, and accommodate it to our personal or racial outlooks. Our individual tactics and inclinations, our hereditary temperament, or the prevailing spirit of the social atmosphere in which we live and have grown to intellectual manhood will determine the character of the spiritual idol which we adore. We shall accordingly have a Teutonic god, a Slav god, an Anglo-saxon god, a Celtic god, a Latin god, a god for the utilitarian and pragmatist, another for the puritan and stoic, a god for the scientist and a god for the philosopher, a god for the Middle Ages, a god for the twentieth century; but not one true Catholic God. We shall have a god adapted to the views and wishes of each of us, whom we can conveniently measure in our respective brain-pans; but not one only infinite, ineffable being to whom we can without self-degradation offer the supreme and absolute service of adoration.

St. Thomas Aquinas (*Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 1, cap. 4) shows that the human race needed a revelation even of the truths of natural religion in order that all men in due time, and with certainty might come to a right knowledge of God and of their relations to Him. He concedes that these truths are not beyond the reach, nor outside the compass of the human mind. Nevertheless he maintains, that only a few men could or would employ the mental labor requisite for acquiring a knowledge of them; that these few would attain this knowledge only after long years of study; and that this knowledge finally attained would in many cases be mixed with error and obscured by doubts. The Vatican council in its Dogmatic Constitution makes this position of St. Thomas its own.

To a supernatural revelation, it declares, we owe it, that truths, which of themselves indeed are not impenetrable by human reason, can now be known by all men readily, with steadfast certainty, and with accuracy. The religious history of the nations which existed before the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity

proves that the teaching of the Vatican Council is the declaration of an historical fact, which must be admitted even by those who do not acknowledge its magisterial authority. Christianity brought to mankind not only a revelation of truths wholly transcending his ken but illumined as well truths which fell within the range of his intellectual faculties, though in fact without the field of his attainment. Before Christianity, among the most progressive and refined as among the rudest and most uncultured Gentile people, the elementary truths of natural religion—the existence of one Supreme Being, the immortality of the soul, the moral responsibility of man for his volitional acts—were not perfectly known and were beclouded moreover with gross and degrading errors. The advent and propagation of Christianity created an intellectual atmosphere of light from out the radiance and influence of which those even who reject its claims cannot withdraw themselves. Within that atmosphere the Christian child has an accurate certainty regarding the nature and attributes of God which reason denied to ancient sage and philosopher. The human mind can see clearly today what in pre-Christian times was involved in darkness for other minds essentially the same. Four thousand years or more of religious experience has proved that human reason needed revelation to prevent it from lapsing into polytheism. Does the two thousand years of Christianity show any further need? The modern polytheism which I have noticed would seem to prove that revelation merely as such does not suffice, that a depositary of that revelation and an organ for its interpretation is required. Men may hold Catholic Christianity to be true or false; but the historical fact is that polytheism either of a national or individual type is the only alternative for it—unless they become atheists.